Let It Be A Fairy Tale

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by hesterbyrde

Summary

When Will had departed, his unfortunate aftershave lingered in the office like a long, late afternoon shadow. Hannibal settled back into the leather chair, breathing it in as though it were opium smoke. As he did so, the silver-framed mirror behind him seemed to shift. It no longer reflected the warm light of the office, but a swirling expanse of blackening smoke. The antlers that framed the glass shifted and warped. Darkness crept into the reflection like oil spreading across silvery water. The edges of the gilt frame softened against the dark tide, fading into the gloom.

Hannibal himself changed with it. At first, as his eyes slid closed, it was just his chair that changed. Elongating. Growing bone-white antlers like a thicket of vines. But then the darkness crept over him as well, polishing his muted brown suit to a robe of inky black velvet. And his eyes, when he opened them to survey his kingdom, were a bloody, viscous red.

“All hail the Fairy King.”

Notes

Greetings all! This is my offering for HannibalCre-ate-ive's Halloween Challenge #ThePumpkinIsPeople.

I've been stewing for awhile on a Dark Fairy AU with Hannibal as the Fairy King and Will becoming the unwitting object of his obsession and desire. I really struggled with this one in the end... it's not my usual fare since I don't generally write AUs or things that aren't porn.

The fic title is taken from the season 3 premier, and the chapter titles are all King Oberon's lines from Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, because I'm a total hack.

Many thanks and much love to KaminaDuck for the beta read!

Thank you so much for reading. Comments and kudos give me so much life. I'll be curious to see what people think of this one. I'm still not quite sure how I feel about it yet.

Happy reading and Happy Halloween!

Am Not I Thy Lord?

It had been almost a month since the incident at the Hobbs residence. Autumn had settled into the crevices of Baltimore, dressing the city in rustling sheaves of red and gold. As September tumbled over into October and Halloween approached, Will had begun to see Hannibal with some regularity. It was still under the guise of just friendly “conversations,” and for their first few sessions, Will had talked of nothing but fly fishing tactics and the finer points of dog training. But Hannibal being Hannibal, he could sense that this was a waiting game. And he willed himself, despite his insistently curious nature, to be patient.

As the weeks wore on, coaxing answers from Will grew easier with each session. For Hannibal, it had begun as an idle exercise in simple inquisitiveness, but it had since blossomed into a full blown mental seduction, with Hannibal as both its victim and its meticulous gardener. But whether Will, armed with his razor sharp empathy, was unwitting and unaware, or aware and willing, the psychiatrist couldn’t be sure. But nevertheless, to the doctor’s great pleasure, eventually words and the secrets of his mind flowed like water from a mountain spring.

“Tell me, Will.” Hannibal went on, sitting back in the supple leather chair. “You’ve said that social interaction is difficult for you with your “gift.” But it occurs to me that we’ve only discussed conversations and meetings between yourself and one other person. How do you fare at larger gatherings? Say, weddings… dinner parties?”

Will wiped his palms on the front of his threadbare pants. “I won’t say that I -like- them per se. They take a lot of energy. Especially things like weddings where there’s a lot of… expectation, I guess. If you aren’t married, then when are you going to get married? That kind of thing. Everyone assumes you’re on the same track they are.” he replied, pausing to lick his lips. Hannibal followed the motion of his tongue with a parched eye, eager to hear what he had to say next. “But big gatherings like that… it isn’t the same as one-on-one conversations. There, you’re trapped. There’s nowhere to go. No reason you’d be looking anywhere but their face. But in a crowded room, it’s possible to play at just being aloof to hide the fact that you really want to shed your skin like a snake and slither back to the hole you came from.”

“A sanctuary in the crowd.” Hannibal supplied, keeping a white-knuckled hand on the reins of his demeanor and on the arm of the chair.

“Hiding in plain sight.” Will nodded. “I… well. I suppose that would make me sound like a psychopath. And that’s rather counter productive to why we’re here, isn’t it, Doctor?”

“Not at all.” Hannibal said, sitting forward but still keeping his eagerness in careful check. “You don’t feel trapped by our conversations do you? That would certainly be counter productive.”

Will frowned in thought. “Honestly, no. I did at first. When I was practically ordered here. But not anymore.”

There was a long pause, punctuated only by the heavy ticking of the grandfather clock in the corner.

Will sat forward, rubbing his hands together. “Have… have you ever gone to a party and just… I don’t know. Pretended to be someone else?” He asked. “Not like… with an alias or anything. Just… tried on a different personality for the night. No one knows your real one anyway.”

Hannibal pouted his lips in thought. “I can’t say I have. Though I’ll admit I have a somewhat different demeanor when I’m in certain social circles. And when I’m playing host.”

“No… no I mean like… putting on a second skin. Being someone else for a little while. A different version of yourself. I…” Will hesitated for a moment. “I do that, if I’m at a big social function where I don’t really know anyone.”

“I suppose your empathy helps with the illusion.” Hannibal said, cocking his head.

Will nodded, scratching absently at his stubbled jaw. “I guess we haven’t totally eschewed the tradition of the masquerade after all.”

Hannibal smiled, showing a few more teeth than he’d meant to. “No, we haven’t. I, for one, am keeping it alive and well.”

“How so?”

“Halloween is in just a few weeks, and I was planning a masquerade for the occasion. Would you do me the honor of your attendance?”

Will’s eyes looked far away for a moment, as if he were already there. He looked tempted and tested before he morosely shook his head. “No… I’d… I’d be terrible company at something like that. Especially with your society friends? I’m sure I’d be an embarrassment rather than an asset to the evening.”

“On the contrary.” Hannibal insisted with a gallant shrug. “It sounds like you would be quite charming. Or whatever else you chose to be.”

“Well… but… I just promised Abigail that we would carve pumpkins together. And… y’know. Do the Halloween thing over at Alana’s. Handing out candy and what not. I’d hate to bail on her. And Alana seems to think it might do her some good. It’s kind of the first time she’s shown interest in anything.”

Hannibal visibly swallowed the rejection like a shard of bone. “I see. Well, your presence will be missed.”

“Maybe next time.” Will said, just as the clock chimed the end of the hour.

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“All hail the Fairy King.” a honeyed voice crooned from a reclining couch below the dias. “You’ve returned early.”

“And you were waiting for me, Bedelia.” Hannibal replied coolly, not bothering to look down at the blonde woman coiled upon the couch, a goblet filled with a generous amount of wine cradled in one hand. “Ever faithful.”

“Aren’t I always waiting on you, one way or another.” she answered, lifting the goblet to her lips to take a drink. “More “another” these days.” she let the words slither out over the surface of her wine.

“We both know you asked to follow me here to escape the judgement of mortals after your unfortunate incident with your patient. You are a guest of the crown here. An asylum seeker.” Hannibal chided icily. He glanced down at her with piercing scrutiny. “And besides, you made no request of me save the sanctuary of the Fairy Court, which I have granted. Your jealousy makes you rude, Bedelia. You know I can’t tolerate that.”

“And your desiring makes you raw. And I tolerate that about as well.” she replied with equally veiled venom. She unfolded herself from the plush cushions and strode up the stairs, her beaded gown whispering as she moved. “What are you wanting, your lordship? What in the mortal realm has made you desirous?”

Hannibal pouted his full lips. “I have met a man” he answered simply, “A mortal man, but one of no small power. His name is Will Graham, and he has the most startling ability to assume and adopt almost any point of view. He has even mirrored my own back to me in perfect relief. Pure empathy, but without any sort of guile or skill.”

“Is it magic?” she asked.

“Astonishingly, no.” Hannibal answered with a small shake of his head. “But his gift is very powerful, however the weapon lacks a handle and so he cuts himself on it frequently.”

Bedelia looked genuinely impressed. “That is no mean skill. Handle or no.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal agreed, sitting back against the throne, heedless of the polished points of the antlers that framed him. They seemed to cradle the king where they would gore another. “I can imagine his presence at one of my masquerades… watching him toy with the fairy court as they twittered on unaware. I’m endlessly curious how that would play out… but I’m certain that it would bring me no end of pleasure.”

Bedelia barely reigned in a sneer. “You said that of me once.”

Hannibal fixed her with a sharp but amused look. “And I still do. Your presence still pleases me, Bedelia. Else you wouldn’t be here. I wouldn’t allow it.”

“You should invite this Will Graham to your masquerade on All Hallow’s Eve,” she suggested then, her bare shoulders lifting in a shrug that feigned at being uncaring.

“I already did. But he declined, citing other plans. He’s passing the holiday with Abigail and Alana.” Hannibal said with a soft sigh. “For someone who dislikes personal interaction, he seems inept at avoiding entanglements.”

“I take it kidnapping him is not an option.”

Hannibal’s tongue skirted his pointed teeth. “I would have him come willingly.”

Bedelia hummed through her nose as she returned to the fainting couch and draped herself across it. “Perhaps you should remove Abigail as a distraction, then.” she replied dryly, before taking a sip of wine.

She was unaware, of course, of the far away look in the King's eye that meant he was taking her words under serious advisement.

He looked down to the long sinuous shadow cast by his throne across the white marble stones of the courtyard. As he regarded it, a shape formed within. A shape of darkness even deeper than the shadows of the trees and crumbling pillars of the courtyard. It grew bright eyes, and sharp horns, and a mouth full of hungry teeth as it unfolded itself into existence at the foot of the throne.

"What will you, sire?" the antlered darkness hissed, gazing up at its lord.

"I seek a mortal girl." Hannibal instructed. "Abigail is her name. Rosy cheeked, chestnut hair, and eyes as moody as the sky in spring. You'll find her in Baltimore, residing in a hospital for those afflicted with mental trauma. But I have a hunch she is not as traumatized as many assume. Lure her here, unharmed. I think you'll find the task simple for your gifts. She is but a lost little fawn, and so will take little shepherding from you. Fit her with a taste for wandering and a lack of direction, and then bring her here. Who knows? You might have a new friend."

The black fey creature smiled, displaying each and every hooked obsidian tooth, before slinking off and disappearing into the shadows that spawned it.

Ill Met By Moonlight

Chapter Summary

Abigail stepped past the treeline and felt the deeper darkness of the woods close in behind her. It was a familiar feeling. She'd stalked at night before, and even without the aid of the moon, she could see well enough to navigate among the trees. It felt secure, even though she didn't exactly have any comforting memories of places like this. But comfort came from feeling grounded and capable in the moment. She could navigate under the clear sky, and felt confident she could outrun most anything.

There was movement at the edge of her vision, and she whipped to see what it was. Nothing. Just the lights from the city echoed in the clouds and peeking through the trees. She continued forward a few paces until she saw movement again on her other side. She paused and waited, stilling herself from even breathing too deeply. As if she were about to take a shot with her rifle.

That was when she saw it ahead. An even deeper darkness against the shadow of a pine. Eyes that glittered but did not gleam. An angular, avian face crowned in black antlers that peered out at her with interest that almost made her quail.

Chapter Notes

Greetings all! Here is the next chapter!

Hope you enjoy! And thank you for all the comments and kudos!

"The Legend of the Corvidae"

The Corvidae are one of the least known and recorded types of forest fey, on account of the few humans to ever glimpse them are rarely ever heard from again. Legend has it that they are born from the shadows cast by trees or pooled in crevasses or blind corners, rising in the wake of the first wave of fear a traveler feels upon realizing they are lost.

They are black skinned creatures with cloven hooves that make no sound as they tread on the forest floor. They are described as shadows within the shadows. Forms of inky darkness, distinguishable at first glance only by their bright red eyes and beaks edged in needle sharp teeth. Some have reported them appearing as hooded figures in plague masks. Others describe emaciated creatures, crowned with sharp antlers.

The Corvidae are curious creatures; unique in the fact that they do not seduce, ensnare, mislead, or bargain with mortals. They never seek and cannot be summoned, but rather are simply found on moonless nights, if a mortal finds themselves wandering without a destination. They appear to act as guides, but only when the mortal in question does not know where they want to go. Thus, they rarely are encountered. Those who have clasped their six fingered hands and followed where they have lead return with tales of fantastical and dangerous places. If they return at all.

Legend also holds that the Corvidae work for a being greater than themselves. Perhaps fey and perhaps not. Mayhap the lair of this greater power is where they lead their mortal followers.

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Abigail closed the fraying book and set it back on the pastel bookshelf. She sighed heavily, eyeing the drab, tattered spine in its place with all the other books with their aggressively cheerful covers. It was as out of place on its shelf as she was in this part of Port Haven Psychiatric. She was just shy of her eighteenth birthday, and so the decision had been made to keep her in the children's wing of the hospital. All full of fanciful colors, and bright lights, and well-worn toys that were useless to her. Even less useful were the staff and other patients. Always trying to cheer, distract, and entertain. It only served to sour her further.

Her mind was full of darker things, not unlike the book she had been reading. Dark things that had no place in a psych ward for kids. Every day in group therapy she would have to listen to children tell stories about their parents. About abuses and trauma and death. And she could see how talking had helped them to process, just like Dr. Bloom had said. But what had happened to her was truly beyond the pale. Even for here. And it made the other children ask all sorts of uncomfortable questions, often with morbid fascination. They clearly wanted a break from the soft cheerfulness of this wing as much as she did.

Maybe this should have happened to her earlier… when she could still change as easily as her younger ward-mates. As it stood, she was about as flexible and changeable as stained glass. Strung up somewhere between adulthood and adolescence. And she couldn't imagine much would change after her birthday, other than her room number. She wanted…

Abigail had no idea what she wanted, she realized, other than away from here. She didn't even know what she was allowed to have or expect. Especially now with the people from the FBI making noises about her being a suspect. At least Dr. Bloom had granted her a reprieve at this end of the month. A little Halloween get together. She and Dr. Bloom, and Agent Graham would hand out candy, make jack-o-lanterns, and drink hot chocolate with little marshmallows (she'd been sure to at least ask about marshmallows) almost as if nothing had ever happened. Maybe it would help. But she didn't hold out much hope.

Except for the marshmallows. Dr. Bloom would probably have flavor options. She tended to go a little overboard whenever Abigail asked for something she could actually give her.

Abigail sauntered down the hall, fingering the cloth tape on her neck under the gauzy scarf, feeling the frayed edge lift. She'd once read a creepy little story about a girl who's head was held on her neck by a green ribbon, and when it was untied her head just fell off. She wondered if they had that book here… probably not. Too scary for little kids. Maybe she could find it and read it to Dr. Bloom and Agent Graham. It would be good for a laugh if nothing else.

She stepped out under the canopies of barren wisteria in the garden. The filtered, pale sunlight did little to rattle the chill from the autumn air, but at least it wasn't still raining. She wandered the edge of the yard, her fingers playing over the rough bricks and their flaking, pitted masonry. The rain and storms from the previous day had left sodden patches that she had to carefully pick her way around. She also noticed that a branch had been helpfully deposited over the cleverly disguised razor wire that lined the top of the wall. Almost as if in invitation.

Abigail squinted at it, and then glanced around, shocked that no one had taken notice of the very obvious breach. But then she realized that the pines, with their branches still thick with needles, obscured the view of the top of the wall from far away. No one had noticed yet.

Perhaps…

But where would she go? She had no one in this forsaken city except the people she knew here, insipid as their company was. And as indulging as she was, Dr. Bloom would almost certainly march her straight back here. And Abigail had inferred already that Will lived a very long way outside Baltimore so turning up on his doorstep was not an option.

She could go see Hannibal. Her stomach twisted at the very thought. The memory of it all came bubbling unbidden and unwanted to the surface of her mind. Of hauling Nick Boyle's body. Of washing the blood off her hands and being reminded of exactly how much thicker it was than water. Of Hannibal's calm, almost approving manner throughout the whole ordeal.

But she realized it wasn't a particular place that she sought. Just the idea of just being out called to her. Of being away where it was quiet. Where she didn't have constant chatter or checkups or anything… The hospital was bounded on all sides by dense forest. If she slipped away without raising a fuss, it wouldn't be hard to hide. Especially for her. And maybe… just maybe she might find a moment of peace. Of clarity that would make everything else more bearable.

Or Maybe she really wasn't looking for anything.

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That night was moonless, and the added darkness aided Abigail's escape from the hospital building. Since she'd proven herself to be fairly self sufficient, the night shift nursing staff concentrated more on caring for the little ones. But she still had to be careful. If she were caught she would have to explain what she was doing up, fully clothed at nine o'clock at night.

But once she had slipped out of the sunroom window and hauled herself over the garden wall, the nervous buzzing in her mind ceased. She leaned back against the damp, vine-covered masonry, and breathed out, watching her breath fog in the cool, humid air. Once again she asked herself where she was going, and again she had no answer. There was no where to go. Just away…

Away…

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Abigail blinked. Perhaps she really was losing it after all. She thought of running back to the hospital. To tell them what she'd seen. To let them tuck her back in bed as if she were half her age. And as the thought crossed her mind, the creature wavered before her, its edges creeping back into mundane shadow. She frowned and instead stepped closer.

"Where go you, human child?" The thing asked, it's voice as brittle as dead limbs in winter.

"I… I don't know." Abigail answered honestly.

It unfolded itself from the base of the tree to tower. It towered over Abigail, silhouetted against the sparse light. "And yet you go. Where go you, human child?" It asked again.

"I… I'm not sure." she replied, taking an unconscious step back as it slinked closer. Its cloven hooves cut down into the mud as it walked.

“And yet you go. I ask a third time and then I will be gone.” It took another step towards her. “Where go you, human child?”

“N-nowhere. I’m going nowhere.” she answered, ashamed of how tiny her voice was.

The creature’s face split in a razor-lined grin, its quilled teeth shining in the dark. “I can take you nowhere.” it hissed. Abigail had allowed it within arm’s reach, and half expected it to pounce, but rather it gathered itself to fully height and extended a six-fingered hand. “Will you let me guide you to nowhere? Nowhere is expecting you.”

She wanted to hesitate. Wanted to say no. But it would have left her where it had found her; alone and still in the forest with no place to go. The only option then would be to go back, and she certainly didn’t want that.

“Come, come.” It beckoned, curling its taloned hand. “Wouldn’t do to be rude.”

She swallowed, and stepped forward, slipping her hand into its grasp, seeing it smile again with all its needle pointed teeth. Now that she was closer, she could see that there was more than one row.

As they walked through the wood, Abigail felt words bunching and crowding behind her teeth.

Where are we going?

Where are you taking me?

Who is expecting me?

But she remembered how the creature had faded when she’d second-guessed herself. And so between the fear of losing her new companion, and the sudden realization that she didn’t care

where they were going, all the questions died like flowers in the first frost.

As they walked, the forest changed. Shifted into deeper shadow. The columns of the trees turned to milk white pillars of marble. The lights of the city and of the last of the fireflies changed, growing bright and nimble and darting in and out of sight. Once Abigail even swore she heard a giggle.

And to her complete surprise, she laughed in turn. Ahead of her, their hands still clasped together, the creature looked back smiling in approval as he led her nowhere in particular.

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Make Her Full Of Hateful Fantasies

Chapter Summary

It was strange. Despite Alana being a pacing, hand-wringing, borderline panicked mess all day and evening, it was like the sight of her pillow was more beautiful and welcoming than a Christmas tree and the glow of a campfire all rolled into one. She barely even remembered sliding between the sheets before sleep swallowed her into its comforting depths.

And she dreamed just as easily. Normally dreams made her restless. They were often full of replays of conversations from the day before, often with strange and intrusive commentary tucked into the surroundings. But tonight she still felt totally, albeit strangely, at ease. Her consciousness unfolded to find her in a simulacrum of her own bedroom. The shadows and beams of moonlight all sharply contrasted, cutting across her bed and floor like shards of colorless glass. And yet, the world felt soft, and cool, and incredibly comfortable.

She felt a breeze kiss her skin, and turned to find the picture window ajar. The gauzy white curtains drifted like ghosts in the-

Wait… there wasn't a picture window in her room. Was there? Was…

Chapter Notes

Here we go! Chapter 3! Halfway there!

Thank you all so much for reading, and for your kudos and kind words in the comments. I really struggled with this one, so it's really gratifying to see that you're enjoying it. <3

"I know you're worried, Alana, but you've done everything you can right now." Will said into his phone with the most soothing voice he could conjure. Hannibal watched as he paced the plush carpet of the office. Alana had called near the end of their not-really-a-session and Will had answered with a clear look of bewilderment. She never called him after hours.

As it happened, Abigail was missing from the hospital, and no one had the first clue where she had gone. Hannibal could hear Alana on the other end of the line. Her voice was tremulous and unhinged, and he didn't need to be able to make out the words to know Alana had reached the point of panic where her mind had begun to chase its own tail. Throwing out every possible scenario and extrapolating every detail all at once, which served only to feed the beast of her anxiety at the situation.

"Alana… Alana listen." Will said trying his best to be calming, though his face was pinched as he gripped the bridge of his nose. "I'm sure Abigail didn't get far. She didn't have a car. She didn't have anyone in the city besides you, me, and Hanni- yes… yes, I'm actually in his office. I was at here for a- no… no, it's fine, Alana. Yes, I'll call you when I get out. Yes. Yes, I'll ask him. Okay. I'll call you later."

He hung up and tossed the phone on the fainting couch with a noisy huff.

"Sorry about that." he said flopping down in the leather chair and swiping a hand over his face.

"Quite alright." Hannibal said, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees. "Something the matter with Abigail I take it?"

"She's disappeared from the hospital." Will replied miserably. "Looks like she found a place where a branch had fallen across the razor wire, and she climbed over the wall. But her footprints vanish in the forest just past the tree line. They're going to have to get the dogs out to track her. You haven't seen her obviously? Alana wanted me to ask."

"No, I haven't." Hannibal frowned with a shake of his head. "No wonder Alana sounded upset. She must be so worried."

Will gave a stiff nod. "She thinks Nick Boyle is somehow wrapped up in all this. He's still missing. Last person to see him was Abigail. Alana thinks he might have something to do with her disappearance."

“I see.” Hannibal replied carefully. “I take it you disagree?”

“Alana’s just grasping at straws.” Will said, with a firm shake of his head. “She knows that the worst thing that could possibly happen right now, given the FBI’s suspicion about Abigail, is for her to run away.”

“Only the guilty run.” Hannibal mused. “Or at least that is what Jack will believe.”

“Something like that.” Will replied spitefully. “No one ever takes the fact that she’s a seventeen year old girl who has spent her life being controlled and traumatized by her father into account.”

“We do. You and I.” Hannibal opined. “And Alana too.”

Will just gave a helpless nod. “For whatever good it does.”

“You understand better than any of us, of course.”

“Not just because of… that.” Will vaguely waved a hand. “I just… I was that kid sort of, y’know? I was different and everyone could tell. So… I get wanting to run away. Feeling like that’s your only option. I’ve...” he paused, clearly realizing he’d said more than he intended. “I’ve just been there.”

Hannibal cocked his head with interest. “Where did you want to go? When you wanted to get away.”

“When I was really small… just away. Away from people talking to me and asking me questions. But as I got older… I don’t know. The fantasy sort of became a meditation. I would picture myself running off into the forest at night in a full dead sprint. The woods were endless and empty of everything save more trees.”

“What would you find there?”

“Just quiet.” Will sighed, sitting back in the chair and letting his eyes drift towards the window. “Just quiet was all I wanted. I didn’t really have a destination in mind.”

“That certainly explains a lot about your choice of living space.”

“Doesn’t it?” Will smirked. “Don’t worry, it’s been examined. And for those not bright enough to pick up on it on their own, usually the dogs make for a good cover.”

“Of course.”

As Hannibal spoke, the clock gently but somberly chimed the hour.

“Shall we continue this conversation over dinner?”

Will paused, clearly weighing the offer. Longer than last time, but it still wasn’t enough. “Thanks, but I’d better go check on Alana.”

“Call her from the car.” Hannibal suggested as they both stood.

“No, I… I should actually go in person. She… I’ve never heard her sound so upset. I’m worried she might think this is somehow her fault.”

“She seems more self aware than that.” Hannibal argued.

“Maybe…” Will shrugged. “Still, I think I should go by and… I don’t know. Anyway… raincheck on the dinner, okay? I… rumor has it your food is out of this world.”

Hannibal feigned a congenial smile to layer over his disappointment. “So I’m told, but I’d hate to be arrogant.”

Will snorted with a conspiratorial grin. “Fair enough. Thanks for the session.”

“Thank you for the conversation. Same time next week?”

“Yeah… see you.”

“Do let me know if you hear from Abigail.” Hannibal said, holding the door for Will. “Alana is not wrong to worry. Baltimore is a dangerous place for someone her age with no where to go.”

“I will. Let me know if she turns up on your doorstep? At least before you call the police.”

“You’ll be the only one to know if I hear from her.” Hannibal nodded. “Good night, Will.”

“Good night, Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal returned to his desk, and after sharpening his pencil, he inscribed Will’s next appointment into his planner. Then he sat back, tapping the tip of his finger on the end of the scalpel. He cut his eyes to the mirror on the wall, contemplating returning to his realm as he usually did at this hour. Bedelia would be waiting...

Not tonight, he decided with an irritated curl of his lip.

He had business with Alana tonight, apparently.

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It was strange. Despite Alana being a pacing, hand-wringing, borderline panicked mess all day and evening, it was like the sight of her pillow was more beautiful and welcoming than a Christmas tree and the glow of a campfire all rolled into one. She barely even remembered sliding between the sheets before sleep swallowed her into its comforting depths.

And she dreamed just as easily. Normally dreams made her restless. They were often full of replays of conversations from the day before, often with strange and intrusive commentary tucked into the surroundings. But tonight she still felt totally, albeit strangely, at ease. Her consciousness unfolded to find her in a simulacrum of her own bedroom. The shadows and beams of moonlight all sharply contrasted, cutting across her bed and floor like shards of colorless glass. And yet, the world felt soft, and cool, and incredibly comfortable.

She felt a breeze kiss her skin, and turned to find the picture window ajar. The gauzy white curtains drifted like ghosts in the-

Wait… there wasn't a picture window in her room. Was there? Was…

The breeze coming through it felt so lovely though. Caressing her bare shoulders and raising goosebumps on her arms. And carrying the scent of night-blooming jasmine, and tangling it into her dark hair. And music… she could hear music faintly but clearly enough to be unmistakable.

She paced towards the open window, stepping out onto the balcony. The moonlight laved her milk-white skin like the rays of the sun, and she couldn't help but revel in it. Everything felt heady and wonderful.

Below her, beyond the white railing of the terrace, a courtyard of marble stretched out across the landscape. Once it must have been a formidable structure, all sharp angles and blinding white. But now it had been overtaken with leafy vines, studded with almost translucent flowers. Dark trees grew up to replace the pillars they toppled with their roots. And the moonlight painted it all in a soft, heavenly glow.

Even the figures moving below. She recognized some were human, and some were not, all moving easily between light and dark though they were too far to see clearly. And music… she could hear it still, drifting through the air as if riding the scent of the jasmine. Alana scurried down the steps of the terrace, suddenly finding herself eager to join the shadows in the distance.

When her feet hit the flagstones of the courtyard, she frowned. She didn't feel smooth marble under her bare feet but rather something rough. Something that smelled… not like jasmine. Like tar. And a sense of disorientation and, worry washed over her like cold water. A sudden worry about something gone missing… had she gone missing?

But then she saw what she was wearing. A strange gown of almost confectionary black tulle studded with sparkling crystals that winked with every breath. She spun, smiling like a little girl. It was as if the night sky itself had been brought down for her to wear.

The music swelled again, and suddenly the figures were closer. They were still hazy and featureless. Almost like silhouettes. Alana wandered among them, and some seemed to see her and bow formally. She could hear laughter amid the rolling waltz, and she turned to see Abigail. She stood in a shaft of moonlight, dressed all in gossamer white, her blue eyes turned a sparkling silver gray. She twittered seemingly only at herself, or perhaps at the waltzers.

But then Alana's sight seemed to shift and resolve, and she could see the shadow within the shadow that loomed over Abigail's shoulder. Its long claws draped dangerously over her shoulders and down across her narrow waist. She laughed up at the creature, and it smiled at her with rows of horrible obsidian teeth.

Alana tried to suck in air to scream, or tell her to run but only seemed to choke on the thick scent of the jasmine flowers. A presence at her back made her turn, and she was met with Hannibal's face, the moonlight catching on his cheekbones and hollowing his face into a grim mask.

"Hannibal?" she managed only the shape of the name.

"I have Abigail." he told her, stepping forward as she stumbled back. "She is safe here. And so are you. Will you come dance with me?" he held out a soft, solicitous hand as he bent

slightly at the waist. A courtly gesture. So fitting for Hannibal… especially dressed as he was in black velvet.

Treacherously, Alana nearly agreed, still dizzy and drunk on the scents and the sounds and the slide of sheer fabric over her nearly translucent skin. She could feel her own translucence. She was fading… washing out into this world of light and dark…

And so she turned and fled, her feet flapping against the smooth marble, even though she could feel pebbles crunching under her tread. She could hear Hannibal's mocking laughter chasing after her as she ran up the terrace steps. "You'll not escape now, Alana. But run if you feel you must."

And run she did, fleeing back up to the room with the picture window, already knowing with cold certainty that it was not her bedroom she was returning to. She flung herself across the plush, four poster bed, carved of the same dark wood as all the trees in the courtyard. A wail of despair escaped her mouth, fogging into the cool air and twining with the music and laughter drifting up from down below.

"You too, huh." a young woman's voice startled Alana from her grieving panic. She stood a few feet from the bed, looking down at her, dressed in gauzy white that matched the curtains and the filmy clouds that had slipped over the moon. "It's been awhile since he's taken anyone… now two in as many days."

"Who are you?" Alana managed, her voice ragged and saturated.

"The kid that nearly caught him." she answered with a casual shrug that looked strange in the formal gown. "Or would have run clear in the other direction if she had known who Agent Crawford was sending her after."

"You're Miriam Lass." Alana breathed. "What is this place?"

"The fairy kingdom. I know-" she said with a snort of laughter at Alana's confused and horrified expression. "I couldn't believe it at first either. But that is where we are. The dark

fairy court… realm of dark dreams, shadows of things that only exist at the edge of the eye. And curious Hannibal is the King. All hail." She said with a snide grin.

"I'm dreaming…" Alana said with a slow shake of her head. "I was dreaming and I must still be…"

Miriam only shrugged. "Maybe we all are in a way… but we are here nonetheless."

"What does he want?" Alana asked, fairly hissing the words out.

Miriam shrugged again. "He kidnapped me because I connected him to a string of disappearances. But I've gathered that most of the actual people here got here on their own. Former patients of his that he found entertaining enough to bring to court. The rest of the fey are all… well let's just say they aren't like him. They all have their own drives. And for my part I keep away from them."

"How do we get out of here?" Alana asked. "There… there must be a way."

"If there is, I haven't found it." Miriam sighed, perching on the edge of the bed. "I gave up after awhile. There's a library downstairs and I just amuse myself with that, since I'm not much for dancing."

"So what… we just wait for rescue?" Alana asked.

"Or we just wait. Unless you're into dancing." Miriam replied.

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Trip We After The Night's Shade

Chapter Summary

A knock on Hannibal’s office door in the middle of an appointment-free afternoon was a surprise. But his courtly, cold politeness melted into concerned familiarity when an obviously worried and frazzled Will Graham appeared behind the door, frantically pacing the waiting area.

“Will.” Hannibal said, stepping back to welcome him inside. “Come in. You look troubled. What’s the matter?”

Will swiped a hand over his face as he entered. “Alana’s apparently been missing for three days.” he said abruptly.

Chapter Notes

Happy Halloween everyone!!! I'm rushing to get these chapters edited and out tonight, but I don't know if it will happen on time. But the fic is finished and will be posted in its entirety this week for sure.

Thank you to everyone who has read, left kudos, and written comments. Y'all are the best and you give me life!

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“Will.” Hannibal said, stepping back to welcome him inside. “Come in. You look troubled. What’s the matter?”

Will swiped a hand over his face as he entered. “Alana’s apparently been missing for three days.” he said abruptly.

Hannibal blinked hard at the news. “That’s dreadful news. Let me get your coat, and then perhaps a drink to warm you up while we talk?”

“I’m… I’d need something harder than wine.” Will said stripping out of his coat and draping it across Hannibal’s outstretched hand. “And it’s the middle of the afternoon.”

“Scotch, then.” Hannibal said coolly, hanging the coat on the hook beside the door and crossing smartly to the burnished cabinet as Will took his usual seat. “You’re not alone in wanting a sip of something at this news.”

“As long as you’re not judging.” Will replied.

“Never. Have they ruled out kidnapping?” Hannibal asked, passing Will a generous helping of scotch in a faceted tumbler.

“Not yet, but it’s looking unlikely.” Will answered, with a grateful nod. He took a long draught, letting the liquid burn through him. “There were… there’s no signs of forced entry or a struggle. No signs of burglary either. But her car, her purse, her keys… everything she would have left with if she’d gone somewhere? It’s all still in her house. And the front door was standing wide open. It was like she just… I don’t know. Wandered off…?”

Hannibal’s face pulled into an exquisite mask of concern as he took a sip of his own drink. “That’s very worrying. I’ve known Alana for many years. These circumstances would be strange for anyone, but especially for her.”

Will just nodded miserably as he took another drink. “And now Jack is crawling up my ass, because of course, I was the last person to see her. And he thinks Abigail is involved somehow. Seeing as she’s still missing.”

“That’s… obsessive. Even for him.”

“Even for him.” Will agreed. “I swear, that man needs hobby. Or a family. Something.”

“The same could be said for you.” Hannibal pointed out.

“I’ve got a nice collection of coping mechanisms, thanks.” He said, waggling his scotch glass in the air. “Whiskey, fishing, and dogs do me just fine. But Jack’s coping mechanism is his work if you really want to get technical. For him to have a mechanism to then cope with that would just get ridiculous.”

“Perhaps.” Hannibal mused, nosing at his glass before taking another small sip.

Will however knocked back the last of the amber liquid and stood, moving to gather his coat.

“Where are you off to?” Hannibal asked, rising as well.

“Quantico.” he answered. “Jack the Obsessive wants me to answer some questions… maybe do a walk through of Alana’s house. You know… the usual rigmarole. I just wanted to stop in and… be the one to tell you, I guess. Since she was your friend too.”

Hannibal’s face puckered into a disapproving frown. “Jack wants you to investigate the disappearance of a friend? That seems like it would be unethical.”

“You know anyone else who can investigate like I do?”

“Still, it hardly seems appropriate. Or sympathetic.”

“When have either of those words ever described Jack Crawford.” Will sniped back. “I’ll be fine. And if I’m not… well, we’ll talk about it on Thursday, I guess.”

Hannibal gave a conciliatory nod. “I suppose we shall.”

“Let me know if you hear anything? From either Abigail or Alana.”

Hannibal nodded. “Of course. I’ll call you before anyone else.”

“Thank you.” Will replied, his best attempt at a genuine smile stretching his lips. “You’re… you’ve been a real friend to me, Hannibal. I’m… not always good at reciprocating, or showing that I’m grateful. But… thank you.”

“The pleasure is mine, I assure you.” Hannibal said with a humorously magnanimous bow.

“I somehow doubt that.” Will said, the barest edge of a laugh falling across his voice. “Maybe when this all blows over, I’ll take you up on that dinner invite.”

“Yes… once this is all dealt with.” Hannibal agreed.

“But… it never blows over with me, I guess.” Will said, shadows creeping into his eyes again. “It seems to always just roll from one crisis to another. Jack always seems to have something for me to wrap my head around.”

“Perhaps that won’t always be the case.”

“I certainly hope so.” Will said, every hint of mirth chased from his countenance. “Have a good afternoon, Dr. Lecter.”

“Give my best to Jack.” Hannibal replied.

***

The next day found Will and Beverly Katz picking through dozens of evidence bags from Alana’s house, looking for something they had missed at the first pass.

“I’m seeing a whole lot of nothing.” Beverly sighed, placing one hand on her hip. “This is the second time we’ve gone through them. Which makes this the fourth time for me. There’s nothing here that isn’t supposed to be here. And nothing missing from the house that raises any red flags.”

“Yeah.” Will replied with a slow nod. “In fact, most of what’s out of the ordinary is what -is- here. Purse. Cellphone. Keys. Her car.”

“Did she ever mention having friends in the area?” Beverly asked. “Was she close with any of her neighbors or…”

Will shook his head slowly. “Not that I was ever aware of. Hannibal might have more insight. They were certainly closer. And Jack had the local PD canvas the neighborhood, since it was a neighbor that noticed the open door. Maybe some of the neighbors saw something.”

“He’s probably still in his office.” Beverly said. “Let’s go ask him, because we’re not making any progress here.” She gestured to the lab table with an open palm. “It’s just a whole lot of nothing.”

Will nodded in agreement, though he was far from thrilled at the prospect of talking to Jack.

But upon reaching his office, they found it surprisingly empty and dark.

“Did he say he was going out? Leaving early?” Beverly asked, frowning through the glass to see if she could spy Jack on one of the sofas.

“Not… that I know of.” Will replied, compulsively checking his phone.

At that moment, Zeller passed by to drop some files in Crawford’s mailbox. “You guys looking for Crawford?” he asked. They both nodded in unison. “You just missed him.”

“Did he say where he was going?” Will asked.

“Something about his wife?” Zeller shrugged, backing down the hall. “Apparently, she’s really sick with some kind of cancer? Anyway, she took a nasty turn, so he left to go see about her. Maybe try his cell if it’s an emergency?”

He left Will and Beverly frowning at each other in silence.

“Did you know Crawford was married?” Beverly asked finally.

“No… no I… funnily enough, when I spoke to Hannibal today, I mentioned that Jack could use a home-life. Something to distract him from his work.”

“Yeah, but then that leaves whatever the work is distracting him from.” Beverly opined. “I wouldn’t wish that on anyone. Hang on… I want to check something.” She looked both ways down the hall before producing a credit card and slipping the lock. When Will snorted at the sight, she shot him a prize-winning smile. “Your tax dollars hard at work.”

He gave a tight, but genuine grin as he flipped on the light. “What are you looking for?”

“Just, it’s that the last time I was in here, I remember noting that there were no pictures on his desk. I wanted to see if that really was the case or if I just didn’t look hard enough. And if anyone catches us, we can say we were looking for the local PD file about Alana.”

“Looks like you remembered correctly. Not a single picture.” Will said, looking down at the shined and empty desk top. “I swear… Hannibal and I just had a conversation about Jack being single.” he said shaking his head and pacing around, looking at the bare walls. “I’m… um… I’m not used to being wrong about these things.”

“Doesn’t Hannibal see Jack as a patient?” Beverly asked with a frown.

“I don’t know.” Will answered with a shrug as they both headed back out of the office, Beverly deftly locking the door and wiping down the handle behind them. “I know Dr. Lecter has consulted with us on some cases, and done some evals for HR, but I don’t know if Jack actually has sessions with him.”

“Hmm…” Beverly hummed noncommittally as they headed back down to the lab.

***

Jack knelt on the smooth marble by the bower of jasmine in a cool shaft of white moonlight. Bella lay in a shallow grave, a thicket of soft vines studded with sweet-smelling flowers embracing her. She would rouse every so often, laboring to take in the perfumed air, and Jack would scramble closer. He clutched her weak hands, smoothed her curly hair, and talked to her. His words were barely more than impassioned babble.

His grief scarcely allowed him to remember more than this moment, where she was suspended between sleep and wakefulness… life and death... And yet he could see in hazy sun-streaked memories of this woman… his Bella prancing across the piazza, a trail of Italian men trotting in her wake. The vision was all consuming. So much so that he couldn’t even remember that he had never been to Italy.

The Fairy King looked on the scene of Jack’s ensnaring grief much as a cat watches an injured mouse. He was pleased with his work on this. Pleased to watch the purity and beauty of human emotion spin out from this normally stony individual like a strand of seed pearls into the moonlight. It was as much a work of art in his mind as the paintings in his office or the music of the concert hall, or the food on his table. He had been curious what form Jack’s grief would take, and he could practically taste the exquisiteness of his suffering.

“You may have finally attract their attention with this one, Hannibal. Someone’s bound to notice.” Bedelia warned as she sidled up beside him, a fresh goblet of wine clutched in her hand.

“I’m counting on it.” he answered simply, not taking his eyes off the couple. “Will has refused all invitation to my home and dinner table. He has forced my hand.”

Bedelia snorted into her goblet. “He’s forced nothing. You’re just desperate. Have you considered what you will do if it’s not Will’s attention you garner?”

“I will trap them as well.” He replied with an elegant shrug. “Just as I captured Miriam Lass when she came sniffing about.”

Bedelia shook her head in bewilderment. “You cannot entrap the whole world to gain one man, Hannibal.”

“I am the King, and I can.” Hannibal answered with a pointed glance, that forced her gaze away. He smoothed his lapels and crisply straightened the sleeves of his doublet. “And I quite simply will.”

***

This Hateful Imperfection

Chapter Summary

First she searched the desk, but found nothing but Hannibal's day planner, some empty sketch pads, and a few pencils with attendant scalpels for sharpening. She moved to the shelves and tables on the first floor. Mostly they just contained more sketch books, with pages filled with work that ranged from expert anatomical drawings, perfect recreations of famous art, and in a few cases, perfect portraits of some of the staff at the Bureau. Some she recognized… a few trainees, Jack, Alana, and even herself. But others were unknown to her.

But his favorite subject seemed to be Will Graham. Some drawings were shockingly realistic. Beverly almost expected them to blink, and maybe even turn to speak to her. Others rendered Will in a sort of hazy and fanciful way… hair crowned with flowers or antlers. And most strange of all, a smile on his face. A real smile… sometimes humorous, sometimes coy, but always blithe and becoming. As if he smiled like that everyday. It was a shame he didn't smile like that everyday, really...

Beverly heard a noise behind her. And then a voice.

Chapter Notes

Here we are! Second to last chapter!

Thank you all for reading and for leaving your kudos and comments! It's better than Halloween candy!

Enjoy!

Will spun the whiskey around the glass, warming it in his hand and watching the firelight play through the cut glass and the amber liquid before taking another small sip. "Have to say, I've never heard of a therapist giving a patient alcohol."

“During a session or otherwise?”

“Both, now that you mention it.” Will shrugged.

“But you aren’t technically my patient. So I think I can afford to be a little unorthodox.”

“Still not sure if that makes you an unorthodox therapist or an unorthodox friend.” Will opined with a flicker of a smile.

“I suppose I’m both, now that you mention it.” Hannibal mimicked, raising his own tumbler with a soft, wry grin. Will mirrored him, and both men took another leisurely sip together.

Will sighed heavily, welcoming the sensation of the expensive whiskey burning its way into his gut. Part of him dearly wished it could burn through his brain instead.

“You look troubled still, Will. Are you not sleeping well?”

Will opened his eyes to see Hannibal looking very fretful. “I’m alright.” he murmured, looking away.

“No word on Alana or Abigail at the FBI?”

Will shook his head. “No… and now Jack has gone AWOL.”

Hannibal’s brow bent into a perfect frown. “He has?”

“Yeah…” Will rubbed his hand over the nape of his neck. “Apparently his wife is very ill? Like, with cancer or something. I just… Hannibal, does… I know I probably shouldn’t pry but I really need to ask this. Does Jack come see you? Off the books or otherwise?”

Hannibal's shoulders lifted in an elegant shrug. "He has scheduled sessions with me in the past, yes. And we've shared a tumbler or three together, though he prefers brandy to whiskey."

"And… has he ever mentioned being married?" Will asked. "I… I know it seems like an odd question. But I've just… I didn't know he was married. And I think we both know I don't miss things like that."

Hannibal's carefully curated frown deepened just so. "He might have once, but mostly we spoke about the tribulations of the FBI and rarely talked about personal matters. Jack Crawford has always been an incredibly cloistered man. It's possible he wanted to do everything in his power to keep his wife apart from all the horrors of his work. A shelter and respite."

Will nodded slowly, taking another sip of the whiskey.

"I would give you the same advice." Hannibal said encouragingly. "My invitation to the masquerade still stands. No strings, and no connections to the complexities of the FBI."

Will gave another tight smile. "Thanks, but I wouldn't be good company."

"I disagree."

"You're crazy." Will laughed. His gaze caught on Hannibal's face. He was regarding him, firelight dancing in his inky black eyes, giving them an unnatural sheen. The look was one of adoration and it made Will's head swim a little. He took a deep breath and convinced himself it was just the alcohol that was making him a little weak in the knees as well as in the mind. "I'd be poor company for your guests then." he said.

"I assure you, I desire your company only for my own benefit." Hannibal assured him, reaching out to give his shoulder a squeeze. Will fairly melted under it.

“Maybe… maybe another time. I promise.” Will said weakly.

Hannibal’s mouth thinned to a line but he kept his emotions in check. “I will hold you to it, then.”

***

The phone rang only twice before Beverly answered.

“Katz.”

“Hey Beverly, it’s Will. I just got out of a session with Hannibal.”

“You ask him about Jack’s married life?”

“I did, and he claims Jack has mentioned being married.”

“Well, that’s especially odd. Because you’re never going to believe this.”

“Believe what?”

“I’ve been calling Jack all afternoon with no answer.” she said. Will could hear shuffling over the phone as she paced. “Then I go to check all the area hospitals? There’s no one checked into any of them with the name “Crawford.” And none of them have seen Jack, or anyone by that description.”

“You’ve checked them all? Even St. Agnes?”

“Even St. Agnes.” Beverly confirmed.

“That’s really strange.”

“You didn’t think to sneak a look into Hannibal’s patient notes did you?” Beverly asked.

Will scoffed. “No. And he never left me alone in the office anyway.”

“You said you just got done at Hannibal’s office. Is he still there?”

“No. I’m his last “patient” as it were.”

“So he’s gone for the night.”

“Yeah. I didn’t see him leave, but he parks around back.”

“Hmm.”

“What?”

“Oh… nothing. I just wanted to ask him something if he was still there. It can wait until tomorrow. I don’t want to bother him at home.”

“Okay. I’ll see if I can get in touch with Jack. Maybe he’ll answer me.”

“Maybe. See you later.”

“Hey.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t… don’t do anything reckless, Beverly.”

“Scout’s honor.”

Will snorted with laughter. “If you were ever a girl scout I’ll eat my shoes.”

“You got me there. Leave your shoes for your dogs. See you later, Will.”

“Bye Beverly.”

***

Beverly hung up the phone and made a beeline for her Jeep. As the engine roared to life and grumbled against the evening chill, she keyed the address of Hannibal’s office into her GPS.

Once she’d arrived at Hannibal’s doorstep, she hugged her red leather jacket tightly around her and knocked smartly. As expected, she received no answer. She realized she wasn’t really sure what she would have said if Hannibal had opened the door. Probably something about Jack. A bit of truth was always the best seasoning for a lie after all. But there was no reply, so her lock picking skills made quick work of the gate and the back door. A girl scout she certainly was not, but that didn’t mean that Beverly lacked survival skills.

She'd been expecting the interior of the office to betray Hannibal's discerning taste, just as his suits did, but she hadn't expected this degree of ostentatious lavishness. A vaulted, almost cathedral-like ceiling. Plush furnishings that begged to be touched or even lain upon. Exquisite art in heavy frames. A giant silver-framed mirror, ringed in matching antlers. A balcony that ran the full circumference of the room, walled in bookshelves stuffed to the brim. And not a speck of dust to be seen.

Finding Hannibal's notes on Jack, if there were any, would be quite a chore.

First she searched the desk, but found nothing but Hannibal's day planner, some empty sketch pads, and a few pencils with attendant scalpels for sharpening. She moved to the shelves and tables on the first floor. Mostly they just contained more sketch books, with pages filled with work that ranged from expert anatomical drawings, perfect recreations of famous art, and in a few cases, perfect portraits of some of the staff at the Bureau. Some she recognized… a few trainees, Jack, Alana, and even herself. But others were unknown to her.

But his favorite subject seemed to be Will Graham. Some drawings were shockingly realistic. Beverly almost expected them to blink, and maybe even turn to speak to her. Others rendered Will in a sort of hazy and fanciful way… hair crowned with flowers or antlers. And most strange of all, a smile on his face. A real smile… sometimes humorous, sometimes coy, but always blithe and becoming. As if he smiled like that everyday. It was a shame he didn't smile like that everyday, really...

Beverly heard a noise behind her. And then a voice.

Hannibal's voice, she recognized.

"This is terribly rude of you, Ms. Katz." his voice seemed to come from everywhere in the room. It saturated the air as surely as the darkness did. She whipped around to see Hannibal standing across the room from her.

Only he wasn't in the room exactly. At first she thought he was, and recoiled, knocking over the table she'd been perusing. But then she realized that he actually stood on the far side of the framed mirror, his form shadowed in the murky glass.

Instantly, her phone was in her hand and she dialed Will. She didn't even think of calling the police or shouting for help. Who would believe what she was seeing? But somehow she knew Will just might.

As she listened to the phone ring, a liquid and sinuous blackness began to pour out of the bottom of the mirror, swirling around Hannibal's feet as it rushed past and out through the glass. It came snaking over the thick carpet towards Beverly. She made a vain dash for the ladder that lead to the second floor with the phone still pressed to her ear, but before she could get her booted foot on a rung, the darkness had seized her. It drug her back from the ladder, pulling her across the floor, knocking aside chairs and upending tables.

"This is Will Graham. Leave a message."

Beverly, still clutching the phone, only managed a frightened shout of Will's name before she flung it aside to make a last ditch effort to keep from being taken. She clawed for the antlers that encircled the mirror, hanging and tearing the sleeve of her leather jacket in the process, and cutting her hands to ribbons. Hannibal had moved to loom over her as she struggled. He seemed more ominous now than she'd ever seen him. He was taller. His cheekbones were more hollow. His eyes a bright, ravenous red. And a smile that could cut glass.

"Come." He whispered. His voice slithered into her consciousness like twining ivy. And with it came a paralyzing cold that sank into her very bones. "You'll be late for the masquerade. And I want everyone in place when Will arrives."

As he turned to go, the void that held Beverly redoubled in strength, and tore her away from the frame. She howled in desperation as the darkness took her deep into the chill of the fairy kingdom.

***

Now Until the Break of Day

Chapter Summary

> “WILL!” It was clearly Beverly’s voice shrieking his name before it cut out abruptly. He must have listened to it a dozen times before flinging his phone against the far wall with a crack that made the dogs all jump.
>
> “Sorry, guys.” he mumbled.
>
> Where was she? What had she done? Surely she hadn’t actually gone to break into Hannibal’s office. But if she hadn’t, and this was a recording of her being mugged, why call Will? Why not call the police? Or the Bureau?
>
> Something about all this was not adding up, and Will was decidedly not thrilled with the conclusions he was being forced to draw because of it. Abigail. Then Alana. Then Jack. And now Beverly. And they all had one solid connection.
>
> Himself and Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

> I made it! With 10 minutes to spare!
>
> Thank you all for all the comments, kudos, and love you've sent me. I really struggled with this fic, since it's not like anything else that I've ever written.
>
> Much love and Happy Halloween!

“WILL!” It was clearly Beverly’s voice shrieking his name before it cut out abruptly. He must have listened to it a dozen times before flinging his phone against the far wall with a crack that made the dogs all jump.

“Sorry, guys.” he mumbled.

Where was she? What had she done? Surely she hadn’t actually gone to break into Hannibal’s office. But if she hadn’t, and this was a recording of her being mugged, why call Will? Why not call the police? Or the Bureau?

Something about all this was not adding up, and Will was decidedly not thrilled with the conclusions he was being forced to draw because of it. Abigail. Then Alana. Then Jack. And now Beverly. And they all had one solid connection.

Himself and Hannibal.

Will loaded himself into his Volvo and sped off through the gusting winds of the moonlit October night.

When he arrived at Hannibal’s office, he was greeted by Beverly’s Jeep, an open gate, and an open back door. Already he knew something was amiss, but this certainly confirmed his suspicions. Hannibal would never be so careless. And one step into the office revealed exactly what Will had feared. Furniture overturned. Scattered drawings. A clear sign of a struggle to be sure. But no sign of Hannibal.

Will felt a little wave of nausea at what he realized would be required of him now. With the room in disarray, and not the first clue as to where Beverly had been taken. Or Hannibal’s whereabouts.

He moved to the doorway again and took a deep breath, letting his eyes slip closed so that the pendulum of light could form behind his eyelids. He let it swing freely in time with his heart beat.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

And when he opened his eyes, he saw the office as he had departed from it earlier in the day. Empty and in order. All the chairs upright in their proper places. No papers scattered on the floor. All through Beverly's orderly and pragmatic eyes.

Will frowned to himself. The table covered in sketches was certainly where she was ambushed, but it isn't where she would have gone first. Beverly would have prioritized. Probably checked the desk first, since odds were good he might keep some records there and if not it would be easy to rule out. He pawed through the desk, knowing he would find nothing of interest, just as she did, before moving on to the table on the wall.

Something must have happened here. She heard something. Or Hannibal entered the room. She turned, phone already in hand, and made a sprint for the ladder. For higher ground. For the advantage. An advantage over what? It would make more sense to run for the door...

But either way, she never made it up the ladder, Will discerned. Judging by some scuffing, she got one foot on before Hannibal… or someone else maybe… pulled her off and dragged her across the floor. But there were no footprints in the plush carpet. And even more curious was the fact that she wasn't being dragged towards the other entrance. She was being dragged towards the far wall. The one with the imposing antler-framed mirror.

In fact, the track across the carpet ended there, at the foot of the frame. Will walked over, following the drag marks in the carpet and frowned darkly at the silvered glass. His own reflection looked back at him, stormy and lost in thought.

A scrap of color caught his eye against the monochrome backdrop of the antlers. A torn piece of red leather, with a red snap on it. Probably from the sleeve of Beverly's iconic red leather jacket. She wore that thing everywhere.

Will stepped back a moment and looked around. The drag marks clearly ended here. And if she wasn't drug to either side, or back away from the mirror… then the only option, absurd as

it seemed was that she had been drug through it. Perhaps it was a false wall. Or a secret door. This was Hannibal after all. And his office. Maybe he had a panic room.

As Will lifted his hand to feel for air currents around the frame, the reflection in the mirror changed. It rippled out as if an unseen drop of water had disturbed the surface, and when the turbulence dissipated, it revealed Hannibal just on the other side of the glass. But it wasn't Hannibal. Not entirely. Not how Will remembered seeing him earlier. He was dressed strangely in a black robe with a high collar and sweeping sleeves. And what appeared to be moonlight from who knows where made his visage seem more like a skull than a human face, especially since his eyes were glimmering motes of blood red light.

"Will, I see you finally decided to come after all." he crooned, his voice more melodious and honeyed than Will had ever heard it. It made him sway on his feet as he did when Hannibal had touched him.

"Ha… Hannibal?" he managed, fighting to keep his feet rooted where he stood. He wanted to step forward. To try and get a better look so he could decide if he should believe what he was seeing. But something… something about the wrongness… the formidable nature the doctor had put on, never mind the strange clothes and… was that a crown he was wearing? A crown of silver antlers not unlike the antlers that wreathed the mirror. "Hannibal what is happening?" He squeaked.

"You can trust your senses, Will." Hannibal replied. "I extended you an invitation to my masquerade. Are you here at last to honor it? Free of distractions?"

Will squinted as he tried to understand… to accept what he was hearing as the truth. "It was you? Everyone going missing? It was you? You've… you've kidnapped them?" Even to his own ears it sounded base for Hannibal.

"Crudely put, I suppose I have. Ms. Katz and Dr. Bloom are certainly here against their wills, but the others found their way to me on their own with very little encouragement." Hannibal answered, before sweeping aside one heavy sleeve and extending a pale hand through the mirror towards Will. "Come. My court awaits."

Will shook himself. Shook his head so hard that his vision blurred, all in a vain hope that when it refocused he would be back in Hannibal's office alone and not lost in some fantasy.

But to no avail. Hannibal still stood beyond the glass, dressed in that otherworldly robe and crown, inviting him to step through the portal of antlers.

“What are you?” He finally settled for saying, still not moving closer.

“The King of the Fairy Court.” he answered as if he were simply naming the college he attended. “The darker half of the court that is.”

“And that’s where you want to take me?”

“Yes.” Hannibal’s hand still had not wavered.

“Why should I go with you?”

“I will release your friends.”

“I don’t have any friends.”

“I must disagree. You were quite insistent on spending time with all of them. And in her moment of greatest need, Ms. Katz reached out to you before anyone else. I know no better definition of friendship.” Hannibal retorted. “Come.”

Against his better judgement, Will stepped forward and took Hannibal’s hand. His skin was cool to the touch under Will’s as he pulled him through the portal. A gust of perfumed wind tousled Will’s hair, making him shiver. It wasn’t that cold. He had a jacket on-

When he looked down to tug at the zipper on his coat, he saw he was no longer in his flannel shirt and torn jeans, but in resplendent finery not unlike Hannibal’s. A linen shirt with the finest detailing in silver thread at the cuffs. And black pants and boots of soft supple black leather.

“I’m dreaming.” Will muttered as they walked on, their footsteps echoing loudly in the formless dark around them.

“After a fashion we all are.” Hannibal replied with a smile. “But that’s not such a bad thing, is it?”

“Not yet.” Will muttered, watching as the blackness before them began to twist and give way to reveal a white marble courtyard that seemed to glow in the moonlight from overhead.

All around them, tucked amid the gnarled black trees and crumbling columns, shapes began to coalesce. Will recognized Abigail first, and nearly sprinted to her. She was rocking and dancing in the shadow of a tree, lost in her own reverie. Will thought she was alone until her footsteps took her out of the shadow and into the moonlight. Then, Will could see she was dancing with a tall gaunt figure, seemingly made of the shadows she had been dancing in a moment before. The creature was frightening, but Abigail seemed undaunted by her monstrous dance partner. She smiled, and laughed, and let the thing whisper in her ear. It’s needle teeth only a scant few inches from her jumping pulse.

Will spied Jack next. He practically tripped over where he sat, hunched over a grave where a beautiful woman in a snow white gown lay in repose. And nearby, Beverly was struggling against a thicket of twisting vines that kept her ensnared no matter how hard she fought. A small of strange shapes and figures had gathered around her… all ghosts watching the struggle. And up on a high balcony overlooking the courtyard was Alana, wrapped in black, crystal studded chiffon, and accompanied by another young woman. And they both looked on, clearly thoroughly miserable.

And in the midst of it all, lovely shapes twisted and danced and twittered and bowed as they passed. The subjects of the kingdom. “Fairies” Hannibal had called them if he was indeed their king. Unbelievable if Will’s sense of reality was called into play. As real as anything else if his eyes were to be believed. As real as the white stones under his feet, and the trees twined across the bow of the silver white moon… unnaturally bright in the clear and starry sky… as real as the scent of the jasmine flowers that lulled him… made him want to stay in their perfumed embrace forever.

He shook himself again. “What do you want?” Will asked as they reached the dais.

Hannibal pouted his lips as he ascended to his throne, a chair of bone white antlers that seemed to glow in the moonlight. Their points cradled the King as he reclined there. “I want you to come to my masquerade.” he answered.

Will looked around him. At all the familiar faces ensnared in the court. “And what of them?”

“If you agree to stay, I will set them free. They’ll wake in the morning, and find themselves safely tucked into bed with only the notion that all this was a terrible dream.”

“Why go through all this trouble if you’re just going to turn them loose?” Will asked. “Was it just to get at me? What… what’s so special about me? I was already baffled that you thought I’d be able to make conversation with people who hold season tickets to the opera. Now I really don’t know what the hell you want with me.”

“But Will,” Hannibal said with a smile that was at once both charming and terrifying. “You and your empathy are so interesting. Long have I dealt with fey who have a taste for certain human emotions. Abigail’s friend with the black antlers for instance has a knack for discovering humans who are wayward or wandering. It’s a sense like any other… sight or smell… but you? Your mind has an appetite for every possible thought and feeling that might grace the mind of a mortal. And a fey too perhaps in time… if you decide to stay with us. I am curious what you will make of us.”

Will scoffed then, a humorless smile tightening his face. “If I stay.” he parroted. “As if I’m going to leave my friends here for you to amuse yourself with. That’s the actual deal isn’t it? Either I stay to sate your curiosity, or everyone else stays to entertain your court.” He gestured sharply to the knot of fairies that had gathered to watch Beverly’s struggle. She was a modern day Sisyphus, nearly tearing free only to be reclaimed again by the twisting roots of the tree.

“I suppose if you want to simplify the matter.” Hannibal replied, the goodwill slowly fading from his voice.

“Mmm… he does have fight, Hannibal.” A golden-haired woman in a clinging midnight blue dress appeared through a part in the crowd. Her voice practically purred through her nose.

“No wonder he gave you such trouble.” She cast a snide sideways glance in Hannibal’s direction.

“Who are you?” Will asked.

“Will, this is Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier.” Hannibal said with a sweep of his hand.

“Not a… fairy then?” the word sounded strange coming off his tongue in earnest.

“I’m the only mortal of the court.” she supplied with a toss of her shimmering hair.

“Are you here willingly?”

“I am. Hannibal and I struck a deal after I had an unfortunate… accident with a patient of mine.”

“It was truly tragic what happened.” Hannibal said, with no more emotion than one would use to offer an opinion about the weather.

“Mmm…” Bedelia hummed through curled lips as she mounted the dais to place her hand on Hannibal’s shoulder. “Indeed.”

“And as the court’s sole mortal inhabitant, what would be your advice to me?” Will asked with a cock of his head.

“To choose carefully. Your friends’ lives hang in the balance, this is true, but so does your future. And fairies can be a capricious lot.”

Hannibal’s lip twitched minutely as she spoke, but he remained silent.

Will watched the whole exchange through keen, half-lidded eyes. This woman, Bedelia, was clearly jealous. Jealous of the place Will would soon occupy as, at least for a time, the center of the Fairy King's attention as they sifted the court gossip like fine sand and toyed with the court subjects like cats with bits of string. He found himself mirroring Bedelia's vicious smile.

"Then I'll stay."

The look on her face alone was worth eternity in the court of the Fairy King.

But it was the look on Hannibal's face that truly told him that, no matter how whimsically he'd made the decision, it was the right one.

"Come then! A dance to celebrate." Hannibal called with great jubilance. In response, the music, which up to now had been quiet and moody, burst into a spinning jig.

"I… I don't know how to dance." Will said, taking an involuntary step back as Hannibal descended the dais steps two at a time, his booted feet barely making a sound.

"Only eternity to learn." Hannibal replied with an outstretched hand. "Only an eternity to learn to dance and everything else besides."

Will took a deep breath, pressed his palm against Hannibal's and gave in as the King drew him in. As they spun in quick circles across the marble flagstones, Will could see out of the corner of his eye as his friends all began to fade from view one by one. He smiled at the realization that Hannibal was holding up his end of the bargain.

And his breath was stolen when Hannibal mirrored the smile back to him. Full of mirth, and light, and the promise of an eternity filled with every possible curiosity.

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